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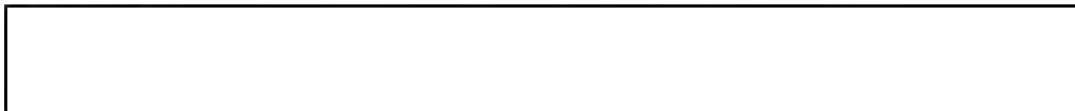
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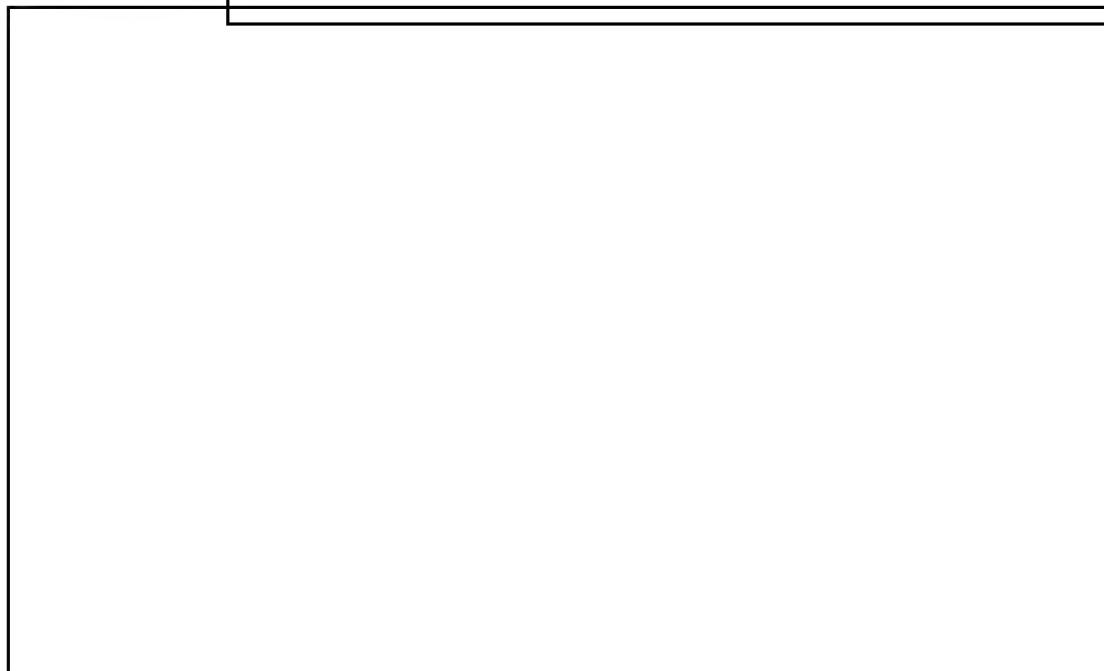
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MALTA-UK: London agrees to new round of talks with
Mintoff.

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MALTA-UK: THE BRITISH HAVE AGREED TO RESUME NEGOTIATIONS WITH PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF IN ROME TODAY, BUT IT IS INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT THEY NO LONGER WISH TO MAINTAIN A GARRISON IN MALTA.

ON THE EVE OF TALKS WITH MINTOFF, BRITISH DEFENSE SECRETARY LORD CARRINGTON TOLD A US OFFICIAL IN BRUSSELS THAT HE WAS NOT AT ALL OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE OUTCOME. HE SAID THAT IF THE NEGOTIATIONS FAILED, BRITAIN WOULD WISH TO COMPLETE ITS WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ISLAND. THE UK'S DECISION TO WITHDRAW, DESPITE THE MISGIVINGS OF ITS NATO PARTNERS AND ITS OWN PERCEPTION OF THE POTENTIAL SOVIET THREAT, SUGGESTS THAT BRITAIN'S POSITION IS AT LEAST IN PART A GUT REACTION TO MINTOFF AND THAT IT WILL NOT BE REVERSED EASILY.

A BRITISH CABINET MINISTER TOLD US DIPLOMATS ON 13 JANUARY THAT UNLESS MINTOFF DOES A 'TOTAL TURN AROUND,' THE UK WILL QUIT THE ISLAND.

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THE MINISTER IMPLIED THAT LONDON WOULD NOT AGREE TO ANY MORE TEMPORARY SETTLEMENTS WHICH WOULD RUN THE RISK OF REPEATING THE TROUBLE IT HAS HAD THUS FAR. HE ADDED THAT THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE FOR THE BRITISH WAS THE MALTESE LEADER'S UNRELIABILITY AND THE IMPROBABILITY OF REACHING A DURABLE ACCORD WITH THE PRESENT VALLETTA GOVERNMENT.

LONDON BELIEVES THAT MINTOFF WILL NOT REDUCE HIS DEMANDS AND THAT THE SITUATION IS JUST ABOUT IRREVERSIBLE. THE BRITISH APPEAR WILLING TO GO ALONG WITH THE DESIRE OF THE NATO ALLIES SO THAT THE RECORD WILL SHOW THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS FAILED NOT BECAUSE OF BRITISH MACHINATIONS, BUT AS A RESULT OF MINTOFF'S INTRACTABILITY. NONETHELESS, IF THE NATO PACKAGE IS ACCEPTABLE TO MINTOFF, THE BRITISH WOULD FIND THEMSELVES UNDER CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE TO DROP THEIR RESERVATIONS.

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